

the 2-1-1 Barometer



March 2011

ASSISTING CONNECTICUT'S UNEMPLOYED

The 2-1-1 Barometer utilizes 2-1-1 data and other information to explore issues affecting Connecticut residents. United Way 2-1-1 handled close to half a million requests for services in FY 2010 from people seeking information and access to health and human services. 2-1-1 tracks the type of information callers are looking for and the referrals that are made, creating a database that serves as a barometer of the needs present in the state.



As the nation continues a slow recovery from the longest U.S. recession since the 1930s, economists are predicting modest economic growth in 2011.¹ Tempering the recovery in Connecticut and around the nation, however, is the continued high unemployment rate. Connecticut's unemployment rate hovered around 9 percent for most of 2010 and is expected to remain steady through 2011. Total employment in the state is projected to grow by approximately 6,000 jobs this year, a fraction of the estimated 103,000 jobs lost during the recession.² Throughout the recession, United Way 2-1-1 has fielded thousands of calls from those affected by the economic downturn, providing referrals to programs that provide help with food and other basic needs, job training assistance, employment resources and much more. This Barometer will review data on Connecticut's unemployed, calls to 2-1-1 from unemployed residents and programs supported by the United Way and the State of Connecticut that seek to assist the unemployed and promote workforce development.

CONNECTICUT'S UNEMPLOYED

At the close of 2010, over 162,000 people in Connecticut were identified as unemployed, similar to the start of the year. The unemployment rate for December 2010 was 8.6 percent. Regionally, the Waterbury area posted the highest rate at 11.6 percent and Danbury posted the lowest at 7.0 percent (Table 1). The unemployment rate varies by age and by race and ethnicity and by educational attainment (Figure 1). Those 55 years and older have the lowest unemployment rate, while the rate of unemployment for Hispanics and African Americans is typically close to or more than double the rate for whites. Also, as educational attainment increases, unemployment decreases.

Table 1 – Unemployment by Labor Market Area, December 2010

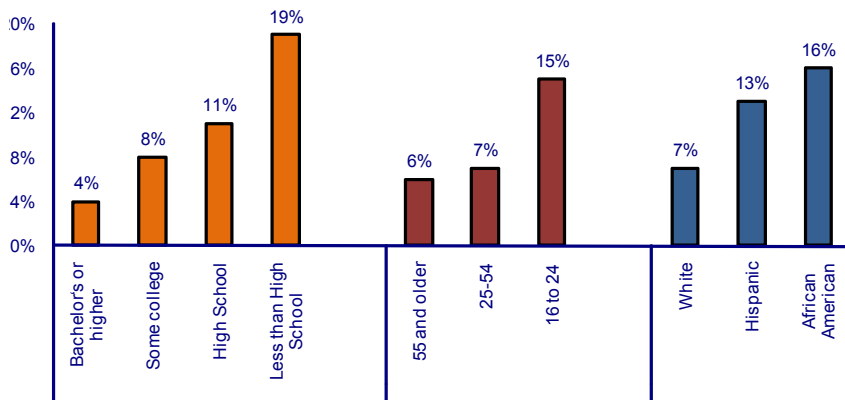
Labor Market Areas	December 2010
United States	9.1%
Connecticut	8.6%
Bridgeport/Stamford	8.1%
Danbury	7.0%
Enfield	8.3%
Hartford	8.7%
New Haven	9.0%
Norwich/New London	8.3%
Torrington	8.7%
Waterbury	11.6%
Willimantic/Danielson	9.7%

Source: Connecticut Department of Labor

¹ Connecticut Department of Labor, The Connecticut Economic Digest, *The Connecticut Economic Outlook for 2011*, January 2011

² Ibid.

Figure 1 – Unemployment by Educational Attainment, Age and Race, Connecticut – 2009



Source: Connecticut Voices for Children

Table 2 – Regional Underemployment Rates

	2002	2007	2009
United States	9.6%	8.3%	16.2%
New England	8.1%	7.7%	14.5%
Connecticut	7.5%	8.2%	14.4%
Maine	8.8%	8.9%	14.7%
Massachusetts	8.5%	7.3%	14.5%
New Hampshire	7.4%	6.5%	12.5%
New York	9.8%	8.1%	14.3%
Rhode Island	8.4%	8.3%	19.2%
Vermont	7.1%	7.0%	11.8%

Source: Connecticut Voices for Children

The unemployment rate does not account for those who are underemployed, that is, those who are employed part-time or have suspended their job search after one year. It is estimated that Connecticut's underemployment rate is 14 percent, on par with several other New England states, but dramatically higher than the rate posted in 2002 (Table 2).³

Among all states, Connecticut currently has the fourth highest proportion of unemployed who fall into the category of the long-term unemployed. There are 135,000 individuals who have been unemployed for six months or longer starting from the fourth quarter of 2007 to present. Twenty-five percent, or just over 34,000 of these residents have been unemployed for 18 months or longer.

While the federal government has extended unemployment compensation benefits for the long-term unemployed, according to state labor officials, close to 21,000 unemployed Connecticut workers have exhausted all 99 weeks of state and federal unemployment benefits. These individuals were leaving the jobless rolls at the rate of 625 per week late last year. On average, workers receiving unemployment benefits receive \$295 per week for an average of 20 weeks.

CONNECTICUT'S FUTURE

Connecticut's historic prosperity and strong competitive position have relied for decades on its well educated and skilled workforce. Today, that prosperity and competitive edge depends on an aging workforce. Connecticut must invest more in younger workers to maintain its economic standing. Connecticut has ranked among the strongest states for educational attainment for its people. About one third of Connecticut adults hold a bachelors degree or higher, which ranks the state fourth in the nation. But demographic and economic trends threaten Connecticut's competitive position. Workforce forecasts in our state predict a decline in educational attainment for younger workers and, therefore, for the workforce as a whole.

Another trend which has been exacerbated in the current economic downturn, but which has been going on for some time, is the loss of middle wage jobs (e.g. construction, technicians, transportation). According to a recent report by Connecticut Voices, middle wage jobs in Connecticut decreased by 6.8 percent between 2006 and 2009. Opportunities for skills upgrades in key sectors will be important for Connecticut to maintain its competitive standing and to put long-term unemployed back to work.

³ Connecticut Voices for Children, State of Working Connecticut, 2010, September 2010.

2-1-1 ASSISTS THE UNEMPLOYED

United Way 2-1-1 has been supporting Connecticut residents to find the help they need for 35 years. 2-1-1 is Connecticut's statewide, confidential, multilingual information and referral service available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. 2-1-1 has the state's most comprehensive, up-to-date database of over 4,600 health and human services agencies providing over 48,000 services. That database is available by dialing 2-1-1 or visiting www.211ct.org.

2-1-1 fields calls everyday from Connecticut residents deeply impacted by current economic conditions. In 2010, 2-1-1 received over 24,000 calls from those who identified themselves as unemployed, an increase of over 18 percent from the previous year. These callers typically seek information on utility and financial assistance, as well as information and access to food and housing resources (Table 3). Call specialists assess a caller's needs during the call to insure that they receive an accurate and complete plan for accessing the resources they need.

United Way 2-1-1's online directory, *Where to Turn When you Become Unemployed*, provides information on state, federal and local resources to help those who are unemployed. Since 2009, this directory has been downloaded over 2,500 times. The directory can be found on the www.211ct.org and is also posted on several state agency websites including the CT Department of Labor and the CT Judicial Law Library. The online guide contains information on:

- Filing for unemployment compensation
- Options for health care coverage for the unemployed
- Food, housing, utility assistance
- Money management training
- Legal assistance and more...

Table 3 – Top Ten Requests for Services from Unemployed Callers, 2010 and 2009

	2010	2009	2010/2009
Total Calls	24,548	20,744	18.3%
Total Number of Service Requests	45,678	43,170	5.8%
Utilities/Heat	7,711	7,766	-0.7%
Financial Assistance (includes temporary financial assistance and rent payment assistance)	6,842	5,810	17.8%
Public Assistance Programs (includes SNAP)	5,291	5,323	-0.6%
Housing/Shelter	5,170	3,965	30.4%
Information Services (includes homelessness prevention programs)	3,541	2,047	73.0%
Employment and Training Programs	3,399	3,726	-8.8%
Food (includes food pantries, food co-ops, soup kitchens)	2,217	2,935	-24.5%*
Legal Services	1,938	1,530	26.7%
Personal/Household Goods (includes clothing, and furniture)	1,301	1,206	7.9%
Social Insurance Programs (includes Unemployment Insurance, Social Security, Medicare and Veterans Benefits)	1,174	1,610	-27.1%

* The decline in food related calls may be due in part to the broadening of SNAP eligibility requirements.



2-1-1 NAVIGATOR

For those dealing with a loss of income, perhaps for the first time in their lives, it can be challenging to understand the state and federal benefit programs available. The 2-1-1 Navigator is an online benefit screener that instantly screens for eligibility for various state and federal benefit programs. The Navigator, located on the United Way 2-1-1 website at <http://navigator.211ct.org>, includes a brief survey that asks a few basic questions about income and household make up. A list of the programs for which a resident or a client may qualify is then immediately generated. Twenty-four different state and federal programs are listed including the Earned Income Tax Credit, SNAP (food stamps), utility assistance and child care subsidies. The site also provides links to more information and applications for each benefit.



CONNECTICUT UNITED WAYS RESPOND

UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL AND NORTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT is focused on helping families become financially stable by helping people acquire job skills, maximize income and earnings, and accumulate savings and assets. UWCNCT led the way on the creation of the Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford, which brings stakeholders together to pool, align, and leverage funding toward workforce investment in three sectors – healthcare, manufacturing, and energy/utilities. Their goal is to provide career advancement services to lower-skilled workers while helping employers fill jobs requiring mid-level skills. (<http://www.unitedwayinc.org>)

UNITED WAY OF COASTAL FAIRFIELD COUNTY is working with a community resource center in Bridgeport to assist people who are unemployed. The resource center, operated by CTWorks, helps people find retraining programs and available resources to help with housing, food, and medical needs. (<http://www.unitedwaycfc.org>)

UNITED WAY OF MERIDEN AND WALLINGFORD partners with the local workforce development board to support development of training programs for young people entering targeted careers and for youth entrepreneurs. (<http://www.unitedwaymw.org>)

UNITED WAY OF GREATER NEW HAVEN investments help employment-ready adults seeking employment acquire job readiness training, the ability to market themselves, employment referrals, employment placement assistance, and retention services. Adults with barriers to employment acquire new skills through internships, one-on-one job coaching, ESL (English as a Second Language) training, and educational referrals based on their preferences, interests, and strengths. (<http://www.uwgnh.org>)

STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF LABOR INITIATIVES

DIRECT BENEFITS provides Unemployment Insurance benefits electronically. Instead of receiving a paper unemployment check, unemployment benefits are now deposited directly into a recipient's bank or onto their debit card. (www.ctdol.state.ct.us/DirectBenefits/Index.htm)

RAPID REEMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE is part of a national initiative which connects downsizing employers with hiring employers, inform employers and job seekers about career events around the nation, and connect displaced employees to employers who are currently hiring. (www.jobcentral.com/rapid-reemployment-initiative.asp?en=ct)

CONNECTICUT'S REEMPLOYMENT PORTAL provides links to job listings, training programs, career fairs and employers. The portal also provides users with the ability to look for available jobs in their chosen occupation or to search for employers who might hire individuals with their skills. (www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/CTReP)

The mission of the United Way of Connecticut is to help meet the needs of Connecticut residents by providing information, education and connection to services.

To access other issues of the 2-1-1 Barometer online go to: www.ctunitedway.org/barometer.asp

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